

PRINCIPLES OF CONFLICT OF RESOLUTION

1. Think Before Reacting

The tendency in a conflict situation is to react immediately. After all, if we do not react we may lose our opportunity. In order to resolve conflict successfully it is important to think before we react--consider the options, weigh the possibilities. The same reaction is not appropriate for every conflict.

2. Listen Actively

Listening is the most important part of communication. If we do not hear what the other parties are communicating we can not resolve a conflict. Active listening means not only listening to what another person is saying with words, but also to what is said by intonation and body language. The active listening process also involves letting the speaker know that he or she has been heard. For example, "What I heard you say is....."

3. Assure a Fair Process

The process for resolving a conflict is often as critical as the conflict itself. It is important to assure that the resolution method chosen as well as the process for affecting that method is fair to all parties to the conflict. Even the perception of unfairness can destroy the resolution.

4. Attack the Problem

Conflict is very emotional. When emotions are high it is much easier to begin attacking the person on the other side than it is to solve the problem. The only way conflicts get resolved is when we attack the problem and not each other. What is the problem that lies behind the emotion? What are the causes instead of the symptoms?

5. Accept Responsibility

Every conflict has many sides and there is enough responsibility for everyone. Attempting to place blame only creates resentment and anger that heightens any existing conflict. In order to resolve a conflict we must accept our share of the responsibility and eliminate the concept of blame.

6. Use Direct Communication

Say what we mean and mean what we say. Avoid hiding the ball by talking around a problem. The best way to accomplish this is to use "I-Messages". With an "I-Message" we express our own wants, needs or concerns to the listener. "I-Messages" are clear and non-threatening way of telling others what we want and how we feel. A "you-message" blames or criticizes the listener. It suggests that she or he is at fault.

7. Look for Interests

Positions are usually easy to understand because we are taught to verbalize what we want. However, if we are going to resolve conflict successfully we must uncover why we want something and what is really important about the issue in conflict. Remember to look for the true interests of the all the parties to the conflict.

8. Focus on the Future

In order to understand the conflict, it is important to understand the dynamics of the relationship including the history of the relationship. However, in order to resolve the conflict we must focus on the future. What do we want to do differently tomorrow?

9. Options for Mutual Gain

Look for ways to assure that we are all better off tomorrow than we are today. Our gain at the expense of someone else only prolongs conflict and prevents resolution.